

## Chapter 19 - Diana of the Jungle

Jane had made her first kill and she was very proud of it. It was not a very formidable animal--only a hare; but it marked an epoch in her existence. Just as in the dim past the first hunter had shaped the destinies of mankind so it seemed that this event might shape hers in some new mold. No longer was she dependent upon the wild fruits and vegetables for sustenance. Now she might command meat, the giver of the strength and endurance she would require successfully to cope with the necessities of her primitive existence.

The next step was fire. She might learn to eat raw flesh as had her lord and master; but she shrank from that. The thought even was repulsive. She had, however, a plan for fire. She had given the matter thought, but had been too busy to put it into execution so long as fire could be of no immediate use to her. Now it was different--she had something to cook and her mouth watered for the flesh of her kill. She would grill it above glowing embers. Jane hastened to her tree. Among the treasures she had gathered in the bed of the stream were several pieces of volcanic glass, clear as crystal. She sought until she had found the one in mind, which was convex. Then she hurried to the ground and gathered a little pile of powdered bark that was very dry, and some dead leaves and grasses that had lain long in the hot sun. Near at hand she arranged a supply of dead twigs and branches--small and large.

Vibrant with suppressed excitement she held the bit of glass above the tinder, moving it slowly until she had focused the sun's rays upon a tiny spot. She waited breathlessly. How slow it was! Were her high hopes to be dashed in spite of all her clever planning? No! A thin thread of smoke rose gracefully into the quiet air. Presently the tinder glowed and broke suddenly into flame. Jane clasped her hands beneath her chin with a little gurgling exclamation of delight. She had achieved fire!

She piled on twigs and then larger branches and at last dragged a small log to the flames and pushed an end of it into the fire which was crackling merrily. It was the sweetest sound that she had heard for many a month. But she could not wait for the mass of embers that would be required to cook her hare. As quickly as might be she skinned and cleaned her kill, burying the hide and entrails. That she had learned from Tarzan. It served two purposes. One was the necessity for keeping a sanitary camp and the other the obliteration of the scent that most quickly attracts the man-eaters.

Then she ran a stick through the carcass and held it above the flames. By turning it often she prevented burning and at the same time permitted the meat to cook

thoroughly all the way through. When it was done she scampered high into the safety of her tree to enjoy her meal in quiet and peace. Never, thought Lady Greystoke, had aught more delicious passed her lips. She patted her spear affectionately. It had brought her this toothsome dainty and with it a feeling of greater confidence and safety than she had enjoyed since that frightful day that she and Obergatz had spent their last cartridge. She would never forget that day--it had seemed one hideous succession of frightful beast after frightful beast. They had not been long in this strange country, yet they thought that they were hardened to dangers, for daily they had had encounters with ferocious creatures; but this day--she shuddered when she thought of it. And with her last cartridge she had killed a black and yellow striped lion-thing with great saber teeth just as it was about to spring upon Obergatz who had futilely emptied his rifle into it--the last shot--his final cartridge. For another day they had carried the now useless rifles; but at last they had discarded them and thrown away the cumbersome bandoleers, as well. How they had managed to survive during the ensuing week she could never quite understand, and then the Ho-don had come upon them and captured her. Obergatz had escaped--she was living it all over again. Doubtless he was dead unless he had been able to reach this side of the valley which was quite evidently less overrun with savage beasts.

Jane's days were very full ones now, and the daylight hours seemed all too short in which to accomplish the many things she had determined upon, since she had concluded that this spot presented as ideal a place as she could find to live until she could fashion the weapons she considered necessary for the obtaining of meat and for self-defense.

She felt that she must have, in addition to a good spear, a knife, and bow and arrows. Possibly when these had been achieved she might seriously consider an attempt to fight her way to one of civilization's nearest outposts. In the meantime it was necessary to construct some sort of protective shelter in which she might feel a greater sense of security by night, for she knew that there was a possibility that any night she might receive a visit from a prowling panther, although she had as yet seen none upon this side of the valley. Aside from this danger she felt comparatively safe in her aerial retreat.

The cutting of the long poles for her home occupied all of the daylight hours that were not engaged in the search for food. These poles she carried high into her tree and with them constructed a flooring across two stout branches binding the poles together and also to the branches with fibers from the tough arboraceous grasses that grew in profusion near the stream. Similarly she built walls and a roof, the latter thatched with many layers of great leaves. The fashioning of the barred windows and the door were matters of great importance and consuming

interest. The windows, there were two of them, were large and the bars permanently fixed; but the door was small, the opening just large enough to permit her to pass through easily on hands and knees, which made it easier to barricade. She lost count of the days that the house cost her; but time was a cheap commodity--she had more of it than of anything else. It meant so little to her that she had not even any desire to keep account of it. How long since she and Obergatz had fled from the wrath of the Negro villagers she did not know and she could only roughly guess at the seasons. She worked hard for two reasons; one was to hasten the completion of her little place of refuge, and the other a desire for such physical exhaustion at night that she would sleep through those dreaded hours to a new day. As a matter of fact the house was finished in less than a week--that is, it was made as safe as it ever would be, though regardless of how long she might occupy it she would keep on adding touches and refinements here and there.

Her daily life was filled with her house building and her hunting, to which was added an occasional spice of excitement contributed by roving lions. To the woodcraft that she had learned from Tarzan, that master of the art, was added a considerable store of practical experience derived from her own past adventures in the jungle and the long months with Obergatz, nor was any day now lacking in some added store of useful knowledge. To these facts was attributable her apparent immunity from harm, since they told her when ja was approaching before he crept close enough for a successful charge and, too, they kept her close to those never-failing havens of retreat--the trees.

The nights, filled with their weird noises, were lonely and depressing. Only her ability to sleep quickly and soundly made them endurable. The first night that she spent in her completed house behind barred windows and barricaded door was one of almost undiluted peace and happiness. The night noises seemed far removed and impersonal and the sighing of the wind in the trees was gently soothing. Before, it had carried a mournful note and was sinister in that it might hide the approach of some real danger. That night she slept indeed.

She went further afield now in search of food. So far nothing but rodents had fallen to her spear--her ambition was an antelope, since beside the flesh it would give her, and the gut for her bow, the hide would prove invaluable during the colder weather that she knew would accompany the rainy season. She had caught glimpses of these wary animals and was sure that they always crossed the stream at a certain spot above her camp. It was to this place that she went to hunt them. With the stealth and cunning of a panther she crept through the forest, circling about to get up wind from the ford, pausing often to look and listen for aught that might menace her--herself the personification of a hunted

deer. Now she moved silently down upon the chosen spot. What luck! A beautiful buck stood drinking in the stream. The woman wormed her way closer. Now she lay upon her belly behind a small bush within throwing distance of the quarry. She must rise to her full height and throw her spear almost in the same instant and she must throw it with great force and perfect accuracy. She thrilled with the excitement of the minute, yet cool and steady were her swift muscles as she rose and cast her missile. Scarce by the width of a finger did the point strike from the spot at which it had been directed. The buck leaped high, landed upon the bank of the stream, and fell dead. Jane Clayton sprang quickly forward toward her kill.

"Bravo!" A man's voice spoke in English from the shrubbery upon the opposite side of the stream. Jane Clayton halted in her tracks--stunned, almost, by surprise. And then a strange, unkempt figure of a man stepped into view. At first she did not recognize him, but when she did, instinctively she stepped back.

"Lieutenant Obergatz!" she cried. "Can it be you?"

"It can. It is," replied the German. "I am a strange sight, no doubt; but still it is I, Erich Obergatz. And you? You have changed too, is it not?"

He was looking at her naked limbs and her golden breastplates, the loin cloth of jato-hide, the harness and ornaments that constitute the apparel of a Ho-don woman--the things that Lu-don had dressed her in as his passion for her grew. Not Ko-tan's daughter, even, had finer trappings.

"But why are you here?" Jane insisted. "I had thought you safely among civilized men by this time, if you still lived."

"Gott!" he exclaimed. "I do not know why I continue to live. I have prayed to die and yet I cling to life. There is no hope. We are doomed to remain in this horrible land until we die. The bog! The frightful bog! I have searched its shores for a place to cross until I have entirely circled the hideous country. Easily enough we entered; but the rains have come since and now no living man could pass that slough of slimy mud and hungry reptiles. Have I not tried it! And the beasts that roam this accursed land. They hunt me by day and by night."

"But how have you escaped them?" she asked.

"I do not know," he replied gloomily. "I have fled and fled and fled. I have remained hungry and thirsty in tree tops for days at a time. I have fashioned weapons--clubs and spears--and I have learned to use them. I have slain a lion with my club. So even will a cornered rat fight. And we are no better than rats in this land of stupendous dangers, you and I. But tell me about yourself. If it is surprising that I live, how much more so that you still survive."

Briefly she told him and all the while she was wondering what she might do to rid herself of him. She could not conceive of a prolonged existence with him as her sole companion. Better, a thousand times better, to be alone. Never had her hatred and contempt for him lessened through the long weeks and months of their constant companionship, and now that he could be of no service in returning her to civilization, she shrank from the thought of seeing him daily. And, too, she feared him. Never had she trusted him; but now there was a strange light in his eye that had not been there when last she saw him. She could not interpret it--all she knew was that it gave her a feeling of apprehension--a nameless dread.

"You lived long then in the city of A-lur?" he said, speaking in the language of Pal-ul-don.

"You have learned this tongue?" she asked. "How?"

"I fell in with a band of half-breeds," he replied, "members of a proscribed race that dwells in the rock-bound gut through which the principal river of the valley empties into the morass. They are called Waz-ho-don and their village is partly made up of cave dwellings and partly of houses carved from the soft rock at the foot of the cliff. They are very ignorant and superstitious and when they first saw me and realized that I had no tail and that my hands and feet were not like theirs they were afraid of me. They thought that I was either god or demon. Being in a position where I could neither escape them nor defend myself, I made a bold front and succeeded in impressing them to such an extent that they conducted me to their city, which they call Bu-lur, and there they fed me and treated me with kindness. As I learned their language I sought to impress them more and more with the idea that I was a god, and I succeeded, too, until an old fellow who was something of a priest among them, or medicine-man, became jealous of my growing power. That was the beginning of the end and came near to being the end in fact. He told them that if I was a god I would not bleed if a knife was stuck into me--if I did bleed it would prove conclusively that I was not a god. Without my knowledge he arranged to stage the ordeal before the whole village upon a certain night--it was upon one of those numerous occasions when they eat and drink to Jad-ben-Otho, their pagan deity. Under the influence of their vile liquor they would be ripe for any bloodthirsty scheme the medicine-man might evolve. One of the women told me about the plan--not with any intent to warn me of danger, but prompted merely by feminine curiosity as to whether or not I would bleed if stuck with a dagger. She could not wait, it seemed, for the orderly procedure of the ordeal--she wanted to know at once, and when I caught her trying to slip a knife into my side and questioned her she explained the whole thing with the utmost naivete. The warriors already had commenced drinking--it would have been futile

to make any sort of appeal either to their intellects or their superstitions. There was but one alternative to death and that was flight. I told the woman that I was very much outraged and offended at this reflection upon my godhood and that as a mark of my disfavor I should abandon them to their fate.

"I shall return to heaven at once!" I exclaimed.

"She wanted to hang around and see me go, but I told her that her eyes would be blasted by the fire surrounding my departure and that she must leave at once and not return to the spot for at least an hour. I also impressed upon her the fact that should any other approach this part of the village within that time not only they, but she as well, would burst into flames and be consumed.

"She was very much impressed and lost no time in leaving, calling back as she departed that if I were indeed gone in an hour she and all the village would know that I was no less than Jad-ben-Otho himself, and so they must thank me, for I can assure you that I was gone in much less than an hour, nor have I ventured close to the neighborhood of the city of Bu-lur since," and he fell to laughing in harsh, cackling notes that sent a shiver through the woman's frame.

As Obergatz talked Jane had recovered her spear from the carcass of the antelope and commenced busying herself with the removal of the hide. The man made no attempt to assist her, but stood by talking and watching her, the while he continually ran his filthy fingers through his matted hair and beard. His face and body were caked with dirt and he was naked except for a torn greasy hide about his loins. His weapons consisted of a club and knife of Waz-don pattern, that he had stolen from the city of Bu-lur; but what more greatly concerned the woman than his filth or his armament were his cackling laughter and the strange expression in his eyes.

She went on with her work, however, removing those parts of the buck she wanted, taking only as much meat as she might consume before it spoiled, as she was not sufficiently a true jungle creature to relish it beyond that stage, and then she straightened up and faced the man.

"Lieutenant Obergatz," she said, "by a chance of accident we have met again. Certainly you would not have sought the meeting any more than I. We have nothing in common other than those sentiments which may have been engendered by my natural dislike and suspicion of you, one of the authors of all the misery and sorrow that I have endured for endless months. This little corner of the world is mine by right of discovery and occupation. Go away and leave me to enjoy here what peace I may. It is the least that you can do to amend the wrong that you have done me and mine."

The man stared at her through his fishy eyes for a moment in silence, then there broke from his lips a peal of mirthless, uncanny laughter.

"Go away! Leave you alone!" he cried. "I have found you. We are going to be good friends. There is no one else in the world but us. No one will ever know what we do or what becomes of us and now you ask me to go away and live alone in this hellish solitude." Again he laughed, though neither the muscles of his eyes or his mouth reflected any mirth--it was just a hollow sound that imitated laughter.

"Remember your promise," she said.

"Promise! Promise! What are promises? They are made to be broken--we taught the world that at Liege and Louvain. No, no! I will not go away. I shall stay and protect you."

"I do not need your protection," she insisted. "You have already seen that I can use a spear."

"Yes," he said; "but it would not be right to leave you here alone--you are but a woman. No, no; I am an officer of the Kaiser and I cannot abandon you."

Once more he laughed. "We could be very happy here together," he added.

The woman could not repress a shudder, nor, in fact, did she attempt to hide her aversion.

"You do not like me?" he asked. "Ah, well; it is too sad. But some day you will love me," and again the hideous laughter.

The woman had wrapped the pieces of the buck in the hide and this she now raised and threw across her shoulder. In her other hand she held her spear and faced the German.

"Go!" she commanded. "We have wasted enough words. This is my country and I shall defend it. If I see you about again I shall kill you. Do you understand?"

An expression of rage contorted Obergatz' features. He raised his club and started toward her.

"Stop!" she commanded, throwing her spear-hand backward for a cast. "You saw me kill this buck and you have said truthfully that no one will ever know what we do here. Put these two facts together, German, and draw your own conclusions before you take another step in my direction."

The man halted and his club-hand dropped to his side. "Come," he begged in what he intended as a conciliatory tone. "Let us be friends, Lady Greystoke. We can be of great assistance to each other and I promise not to harm you."

"Remember Liege and Louvain," she reminded him with a sneer. "I am going now--be sure that you do not follow me. As far as you can walk in a day from this spot in any direction you may consider the limits of my domain. If ever again I see you within these limits I shall kill you."

There could be no question that she meant what she said and the man seemed convinced for he but stood sullenly eyeing her as she backed from sight beyond a turn in the game trail that crossed the ford where they had met, and disappeared in the forest.